

# Flu and Flu Vaccination

## Frequently Asked Questions for Vermont State Employees/Retirees

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## *Vermont State Employees' Flu Vaccination Clinics*

### Who can come to the Vermont State Employee Flu Clinics?

Active, retired and temporary state employees, regardless of their insurance coverage, are eligible. Non-State employees and retirees (spouses, children, contractors, etc.) are not eligible for vaccinations at these clinic sites. Visit [www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/flu/flu\\_clinics.aspx](http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/flu/flu_clinics.aspx) for other flu clinics.

### How much does it cost?

There is no copay and no out-of-pocket cost to participants for the vaccination.

### Where can I get a shot?

Clinics will be offered at 26 state office buildings throughout Vermont. A schedule with exact sites, dates and times will be made available on our website: (<http://www.vermontpersonnel.org/employee/wellness.php>) on September 14 and will also be distributed through your HR Partners and volunteer wellness coordinators and through the mail to retirees.

### Do I have to take sick, personal or vacation time to get my shot at a worksite clinic?

The Vermont State Employees' Wellness Program has requested that agency and department heads allow flexibility in work schedules so that employees may attend worksite clinics. Because each worksite is different, it is at the manager's discretion. There is no mileage reimbursement.

If you choose to receive your shot at a location other than the official state clinic sites, you will need to use leave time.

### When and how do I register?

Register online, starting September 14, 2009 at <http://vt.healthyachievers.com>. You will also receive information through your HR Partners/volunteer wellness coordinators and through the mail (for retirees). The deadline for registration at a particular site will be 24 hours before the scheduled clinic (Thursday for a Monday clinic.) Slots will be filled on a first come, first served basis.

Telephone registration will also be available for those with no computer access (Monday – Friday, 9AM – 6PM). The phone number is: 1-800-371-8384. Ask to register for a "State of VT Flu Shot". After hours, please leave a message and your call will be returned during regular office times.

All registration information, schedules, directions vaccine information sheet and frequently asked questions will also be available on the State Employees' Wellness Program website at: <http://www.vermontpersonnel.org/employee/wellness.php>.

### Will other people have the same appointment time as me?

Yes, multiple people will have the same appointment time as you. It should only about 15 minutes to complete the process and there will be more than one nurse vaccinating at the same time.

### Will you accept walk ins?

We will try our best to accommodate walk-ins, but **scheduled appointments will have priority**. We cannot guarantee that there will be time or vaccine available for walk-ins on any given day. If you choose to walk in, there may be a long wait time or you may be asked to come back at another time. Walk-ins must have your insurance card (Medicare, CIGNA) if applicable and proof of eligibility (State ID, pension or pay statement).

### Who is administering the flu shots?

All vaccinations will be given by VT Licensed Nurses who are employed by our vendor, Occupational Health Strategies, Inc. DBA Healthy Achievers. This vendor was chosen through a full State bid process.

### How will my privacy be protected?

All of the nurses administering shots are bound by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Health information will be protected and treated as confidential.

Flu shots will be given in large open conference rooms and many employees will be receiving shots at the same time. The flu shot must be given into the muscle of your upper arm. To ensure your own comfort and the timely administration of your shot, please remember to wear something that will give the vaccinator easy access to your arm. A limited number of privacy screens will be available for those who need them.

### How will I know if I am eligible to receive a shot?

When you register, you will receive a release form with a series of questions. The purpose of this form is to identify those who are not eligible to receive the shot due to allergy or other medical reasons. If you are unsure, please check with your health care provider prior to coming to a clinic. The nurse will review your paperwork with you before giving your shot. Non-State employees and retirees (spouses, children, contractors, etc.) are not eligible for vaccinations at these clinic sites.

### What if I am sick on the day of my appointment?

CDC guidelines state that if you are sick with a fever when you go to get a flu shot, you should talk to your health care provider about getting your shot at a later date as the vaccination may be less effective. However, you can get a flu shot at the same time you have a respiratory illness without fever or if you have another mild illness.

### What should I expect with the actual process of getting vaccinated?

Vaccine and all related supplies will be handled under strict CDC guidelines. All vaccinators are VT Licensed nurses and are very well-trained in the proper administration of vaccines as well as the handling and disposal of the related supplies.

All of the nurses administering shots will use hand sanitizer between employee vaccinations. If they (nurses) have cuts or breaks in their skin, they will wear gloves to protect themselves from possible contact with blood when giving a shot. Nurses wearing gloves will also use hand sanitizer and will change gloves between employees.

Vaccines are administered using sterile disposable syringes. They are one time use only. Nurses often will pre-fill syringes and you may see them on the table. These are not used syringes. Once a syringe has been used, it will be disposed of in a container specifically for this purpose. Before giving a shot, the nurse will prepare the area with alcohol. The shot will be administered in the upper muscle of your arm. All recipients will receive a bandage at the injection site.

### What should I bring/wear to the flu clinic?

Be sure to bring a completed signed copy of the flu release form, your health insurance card(s) for verification (if you are covered by CIGNA and/or Medicare) and proof of state employment eligibility (State ID card, pay or retirement statement)

Please wear appropriate clothing to allow access to your upper arm.

### May I arrive early for my shot?

You may arrive early, but understand that no vaccinations will be given prior to the advertised start of the clinic and appointments scheduled before yours will be given priority.

### Will I be asked to wait after my shot?

Individuals who have had a flu shot before will not be required to wait. Participants who are receiving the flu shot for the first time will be asked to wait for 10-15 minutes. Clinic nurses are well-trained to respond to an adverse reaction and will have appropriate aids available.

## *The Flu and the Flu Shot*

### What is the seasonal flu?

Seasonal flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the influenza virus.

### How do people become infected with the flu?

Seasonal flu spreads mainly from person-to-person through contact. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, the nasal secretions containing the flu virus can get into the air or onto surfaces. An individual may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching his/her mouth or nose.

Some important facts:

- The virus can remain active on surfaces for two to eight hours.
- Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 days after becoming sick.
- **You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.**

### Who should get a flu shot?

Everyone

Groups at higher risk are as follows:

- Anyone 50 years of age and older
- Pregnant/breastfeeding women
- People with certain chronic medical conditions such as:
  - Weakened immune systems
  - Blood disorders
  - Respiratory disorders
  - Muscle/nerve disorder
  - Cardiovascular disorders
  - Metabolic disorders, such as diabetes
- Household contacts/caregivers of children under 6 months of age, over 50 or anyone at high risk due to a medical condition
- Health care workers
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- All children ages 6 months through 18 years
- Travelers

### Who should **not** get a flu shot?

- Have ever had a severe allergic reaction to eggs
- Have ever had a severe allergic reaction to a previous flu shot
- Have a history of Guillain-Barré syndrome (a paralytic nerve disease)

### Who should **not** get a flu shot? (continued)

- If you are sick with a fever the day of your appointment, you should talk to your health care provider about getting your shot at a later date, as the vaccine may be less effective. However, you can get a flu shot at the same time you have a respiratory illness without fever or if you have another mild illness.
- Anyone under these categories should speak with their health care provider before getting a shot.

### Why should I get a flu shot?

Each year over 36,000 people in the U.S. die and over 200,000 people are hospitalized from complications of the seasonal flu. The risk of serious complications is especially pronounced for the elderly or those with compromised immune systems.

The flu shot is 70-90% effective in preventing the flu and spreading the virus to others. Receiving the shot increases the chance that individuals will stay healthy, lose fewer days of work, and enjoy more days of play. Even if you do get the flu, your symptoms will be much less severe and will not last as long as someone who was not vaccinated.

### When is a good time to get a flu shot?

The best time to get a flu shot is prior to the start of the flu season, which runs from November through May. It is possible to get the shot at any time during the flu season. Vermont state employee flu vaccination clinics will run at locations throughout the state from October 19-November 13.

It is important to note that the effectiveness of the vaccine declines throughout the year and is only considered effective for the current flu season. Vaccines are changed yearly in response to the most common virus strains that are present in the environment.

### Will the seasonal flu vaccine protect me against H1N1 (formerly known as the “swine flu”)?

No. National health officials are researching the need for a separate H1N1 flu vaccine. The Wellness Program will not be administering H1N1 vaccines. Any local vaccinations will be coordinated through the VT Department of Health. Visit their website at: <http://healthvermont.gov/panflu/SwineFlu.aspx>. It will be very important for the public to follow upcoming health care advice on the H1N1, as this virus may cause more illness or more severe illness than usual. To learn more about novel H1N1, visit the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>.

### What is the difference between the seasonal flu and H1N1 flu?

Seasonal Flu	H1N1 Flu
Affects 5-20% of the American population annually. Spread's person to person. As many as 60 million people contract the flu each year. More than 200,000 people are hospitalized and more than 36,000 people die.	Spreads from person to person worldwide. One June 11 <sup>th</sup> , 2009, The World Health Organization (WHO) signaled that a pandemic was underway. A pandemic is a spreading of an infectious disease across a large region or throughout all continents.
Generally, 90% of the people that are hospitalized are over 65 years old.	Adults greater than 65 possibly have immunity towards the H1N1 flu. The at-risk age group is anyone who is 6 months old – 24 years old, pregnant women, and people who have a chronic condition like heart disease, asthma and diabetes.
Symptoms of the seasonal flu include fever, sore throat, chills, extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, dry cough, headache, muscle aches, and runny or stuffy	Most of the symptoms are similar to seasonal flu like fever, cough, sore throat, headaches, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who

nose. Sometimes infected individuals experience stomach symptoms like nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.	have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.
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### Will I get sick from the flu shot?

No. The vaccine is made from dead (non active) flu virus that will not cause the flu. Side effects are possible, although the majority of people who receive a flu shot have no serious problems from it. Some common side effects are: soreness and/or swelling at the injection site, fever, fatigue, muscle aches, sore throat or cough. These minor side effects can last for 1 or 2 days.

On rare occasions, flu shots can cause serious problems such as severe allergic reaction usually within a few minutes to a few hours. Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness. Seek immediate medical attention and contact your health care provider if these symptoms occur.

### What should I do if I have a severe allergic reaction?

If a severe reaction occurs after you have left the flu vaccination clinic, call 911 or seek emergency assistance immediately and contact your primary care provider.

### I heard that the flu vaccine contains mercury. Is this true?

Yes. Multi-dose flu vaccine contains small amounts of the preservative thimerosal, which is a mercury derivative. There is no convincing evidence that the low doses of thimerosal found in flu vaccines cause harm to adults or to the developing fetuses of pregnant women who received the vaccine.

Those with "sensitivity" to thimerosal may experience minor reactions like redness and swelling at the injection site. The risk of influenza related complications outweighs the risk of adverse reactions with thimerosal. We will have limited quantities of thimerosal -free influenza vaccine available.

### What is the chance that I will get the flu despite getting a shot?

Each year, a new vaccine is created to protect against the three most common strains of virus from the prior year. It is estimated that these strains will account for 70-90% of the flu that year. This means you still have some (10-30%) chance of getting the flu, even if you are vaccinated. However, your symptoms will be much less severe and will not last as long as someone who was not vaccinated.

It takes two weeks for protection to develop after you have received the shot. If you get the flu shortly after receiving the shot, it may mean that you were exposed to the virus before you were vaccinated or in the two week period before the shot is considered effective.

### For how long is the flu shot protective against the flu?

Protection lasts up to a year. It is important to get vaccinated annually, as the most common strains of virus change from year to year.

### What else can I do to protect myself and others against the flu?

- When you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or upper sleeve (not your hands). If you use a tissue, throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often for approximately 20 seconds with soap and warm water. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective. It is especially important to wash your hands after you cough or sneeze, when dealing with food or after using the bathroom.
- Drink lots of liquids.
- Get plenty of sleep.

- Try not to touch your nose, mouth, or eyes.
- Try to avoid contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, stay home to avoid spreading illness in your workplace.

### What are the symptoms of the flu?

Symptoms include:

- fever >101F
- sore throat
- chills
- extreme fatigue
- loss of appetite
- stomach symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and sometimes diarrhea
- dry cough
- headache
- muscle aches
- runny, stuffy nose

### What should I do if I get the flu?

Please stay home if you are sick! The CDC recommends that you stay home from work for 7 days after symptoms begin, or until you are symptom-free for 24 hours, whichever is longer. To keep from infecting others, it is important to limit contact. Most healthy people recover from the flu without complications. Here are some ideas to put you on the road to recovery:

- Get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids, and avoid using alcohol and tobacco.
- Consider over-the-counter (OTC) medications to relieve the symptoms of s flu (Check with your primary provider first if you take other medications or have other health conditions. Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, particularly fever).
- Remember that serious illness from the flu is more likely in certain groups of people, including people 65 and older, pregnant women, people with certain chronic medical conditions and young children.
- Consult your doctor early on for the best treatment, but also be aware of emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention.

### What are the signs of serious complications with the flu and what should be done about them?

**In children**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

**In adults**, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

**Seek emergency medical care** if you or someone you know is experiencing any of the signs above.

Where can I find additional information about the flu and the flu shot?

- Vermont State Department of Health @ 1-800-464-4343 or <http://health.vermont/prevent/flu>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 1-800-232-4636 or [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu) or <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>
- Information in other languages at [http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis\\_fluinactive.asp](http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis_fluinactive.asp)